Influence of Internet Information on Young Adults’ Electronic Cigarette Perceptions and Behaviors

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Introduction

Since the development of the e-cigarette in 2004, its popularity and use have continued to increase among young adults. King, Patel, Nguyen, and Dube (2014) found that the percentage of adults who are aware of e-cigs nearly doubled, from 40.9% in 2010 to 79.7% in 2013. Also during this period, the percentage of adults who have used an e-cig more than doubled from 3.3% to 8.5%. By 2014, 12.6% of all adults in the United States had tried an e-cig (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2014a). Among the adult population, young adults have the highest rate of e-cig use. According to the CDC (2014a), 21.6% of U.S. young adults (18-24 years) have used an e-cig, compared to 16.6% for mid-adults (25-44 years), 10.2% for older adults (45-64 years), and 3.7% for the elderly (65 years and above).

The exponential increase in popularity and use of e-cigs is a source of concern because of the increasing evidence of several health risks associated with their use. The high concentrations of nicotine found in e-cigs have highly increased the risk of nicotine poisoning. In fact, calls to poison centers for nicotine poisoning related to e-cig use increased from 1 per month in 2010 up to 215 per month in 2014 (CDC, 2014b). Furthermore, nicotine in e-cigs can lead to addiction and may serve as a ‘gateway’ to the use of other tobacco products and other psychoactive substances (Bunnell et al., 2015; Gostin & Glasner, 2014; Kandel & Kandel, 2014). Additionally several studies have shown that e-cigs contain substances which can cause lung diseases and cancer (Jensen et al., 2015; Allen et al., 2015; William et al., 2013; Flouris & Oikonomou, 2010).

Current research suggests that there may be a relationship between online e-cig information and the recent increase in e-cig use among youth (adolescents and young adults). For instance, Dube et al. (2013) analyzed data from the 2011 National Youth Tobacco Survey and found that exposure to online pro-tobacco advertisements increased the susceptibility of youth to
experimentation with tobacco products. Other authors have attributed the increase in experimentation with e-cigs to increased advertising (Ahern & Mechling, 2014; Gostin & Glasner, 2014; McKee, 2013).

Therefore, the main objective of this research is to investigate how online e-cigarette information affects young adults’ perception and behaviors. This research is significant because it will contribute to knowledge about the role of internet information in e-cig use by young adults. The knowledge will inform prevention and intervention programs and may help to formulate policies and regulations that may prevent or reduce the use of tobacco products. This may in turn reduce the rates of nicotine poisoning, nicotine addiction, abuse of other psychoactive substances, and other health risks associated with e-cigs.

Methods

Data Collection

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Cincinnati (UC) and a sample of 412 UC students aged 18-24 years provided data for this study in the fall of 2015. The instrument was a 42-item survey instrument which took 5-10 minutes to complete. Survey questions assessed participants’ knowledge, attitudes, behavioral intentions and behaviors related to e-cigs, and their extent of exposure to internet information about e-cigs.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), a data analysis software, will be used for analysis. This presentation will review key literature and results of preliminary analyses to examine the use and perceptions of e-cigs among college students.
References


